THOMAS STRINGER.

HIS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING DURING THE YEAR 1898–1899.

BY

MICHAEL ANAGNOS.

[*Reprinted from the thirteenth annual report of the Kindergarten for the Blind.*]

BOSTON
GEO. H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 272 CONGRESS STREET
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FOR THE BLIND INC.

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THOMAS STRINGER.

O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
For better love would seldom yearn,
Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from you I learn.
— WORDSWORTH.

The case of this remarkable boy presents a most striking example of the legitimate results of careful and systematic training, of wholesome domestic influences and of unwavering devotion to the task of repairing appalling damages done by the destructive hand of fate so far as these are reparable. We are therefore especially pleased to note the steady development of his mental faculties and moral qualities and the marked improvement made in his personal appearance and general condition.

Seldom in the recent history of education has there been a case of such remarkable success and pedagogical importance as that of Tommy Stringer. Considering the circumstances attendant upon the early life of this child and the very low state of being in which he was seven years ago, his development is truly marvellous. He started from the lowest round in the ladder of human intelligence and has achieved a success which commands general admiration and is a perennial source of inspiration.

As has been repeatedly stated in these reports, at the time of his admission to the kindergarten Tommy was nothing but a lump of clay fashioned in the form of a child with the breath of life in it.

THOMAS STRINGER.

He scarcely differed from a little animal, from an infant *cuniculus* or good-natured puppy. His sensations and emotions were in a dormant state and they generated no desires of any kind nor did they impel him to do this or that. In all his

actions and movements he was prompted by a natural blind impulse, having no other end in view save the satisfaction of his corporeal wants. He simply vegetated, performed the vital functions and increased in size but in nothing else. It may be said of him, with strict truth, that he was only breathing; he was not living. For, according to Goethe,—

Frei athmen macht das Leben nicht allein.

Silent and sightless, sad and lone, this hapless boy was doomed to be cast into some sort of receptacle of misery and gloom and to spend his days wearily in a tomb of awful darkness and stillness. He appeared to be weak and languishing both in body and mind and wholly devoid of animation. His first photograph taken several months after his arrival in Boston represents him as a pitiable specimen of dulness and lethargy. Instead of standing erect and walking or running like other children, he was inclined to go on hands and feet like a quadruped and to creep backwards. He was entirely cut off from his environment and deprived of all means of communication with his fellowmen. His apathy and obtuseness, his stolidity and inertness, his utter unconsciousness of his deprivation and his supreme unconcern about his isolation from the outer world, all combined together to form a strong barrier about him, which had to be penetrated by strenuous effort and arduous labor before it could be ascertained whether there were any signs of intelligence behind it.

Such was the physical and mental condition of the unfortunate boy when a kind nurse brought him from the hospital in Allegheny to South Boston, wrapped in a loose garment and supplied with a few additional

articles of clothing. He reached the Perkins Institution early in the morning and no sooner was he seated on a sofa in the reception room, close to his companion, than he fell sound asleep. Owing to the fact that the nurse who attended to him while he was staying at the hospital was on duty during the night, the order of his periods of wakefulness and repose was necessarily reversed, and as it had become a regular habit with him to sleep in the daytime from dawn to dusk, all efforts to rouse him before the evening proved entirely unsuccessful. It was impossible to stir him. Toward sunset he awoke quite refreshed from the fatigue of his journey and was at once taken to the kindergarten in Jamaica Plain and placed under the supervision of a young woman who was employed with the express purpose of looking after him and of serving as his special tutor. Then the work of piercing through the impervious fastnesses of locked and never-opening senses and of liberating his spirit from its captivity was begun with great earnestness and unflagging industry.

It was peculiarly fortunate for Tommy that his lines were cast for him in such a place as the kindergarten. Here he was cared for and treated with diligent watchfulness and loving solicitude. Here his wants were plentifully supplied and the healthful and genial influences which were brought to bear upon him were calculated to rouse him from his slothfulness, to vivify him and to quicken his activities. Here affection and devotion were abundantly bestowed upon him, and all possible ways and means were employed to build up his physique, to strengthen his muscles, to enliven and develop his brain, to train his hands and to release his spirit from its depressing incarceration.

The methods and processes used for Tommy's deliverance and instruction were similar to those which were devised by Dr. Samuel G. Howe for the benefit of Laura Bridgman. These were applied with a patience that had no limits, with a perseverance that knew no relaxation, with an enthusiasm that was unquenchable, and with a faith that could not be shaken by difficulties. With all these advantages the way to victory was effectually blocked up for nearly six months by Tommy's absolute indifference to what was going on around him, aggravated beyond measure by his stolid indolence and stubborn obstinacy. The trial of one expedient after another proved to be a failure, and there was at times ample cause for discouragement, if not for despair; but the marvellous achievement of Laura's liberator stood before us as a beacon light, illumining our pathway, stimulating our energies and urging us to take heart and go forward. At length the battle was won. After hundreds of experiments and innumerable attempts an aperture was finally opened through the triple walls of the unfortunate boy's prison and a new jewel was thereby added to the magnificent crown of philanthropy. He was at last made to understand distinctly that things have names which can be represented by arbitrary signs or letters of the manual alphabet formed upon the fingers, and thus he was freed from the thraldom of his terrible affliction and restored to his human estate.

> His imprisoned spirit, its bond in twain,
> The life abroad has sought, and not in vain.

The unremitting care and the rational training which Tommy received at the kindergarten under the best of auspices and the most wholesome and genial influences were as quickening to his mind and as benefi-

cent to his spirit as sunshine and dew and air are to the flowers. Through these agencies there has been a transformation wrought which is little short of a miracle. Out of a puny, weak, inert, drowsy, listless, languid, sluggish, helpless little creature has been evolved a fine specimen of childhood, a well-formed and manly boy, strong, hale, active, alert, hearty, lively, self-reliant.

> O, ye with banners and battle shot,
> And soldiers to shout and praise,
> I tell you the kingliest victories fought
> Are fought in these silent ways.

Since his mind has been released from its sepulchral confinement Tommy has been steadily gaining in physical strength, intelligence and goodness of heart, while at the same time he has grown more attractive in appearance. He is one of the best, the kindliest and the most natural and honest boys in the school. Teeming with mirth and jollity, at times he seems to be mischief incarnate and roguery personified; yet, although full of pranks, he is nevertheless strictly truthful, invariably courteous and entirely free from malice or vulgarity. Tommy abounds in the "honest animalisms of the young cub," which Sidney Lanier found in his little boys, but not in the "juicy selfishness" which he ascribes to them. He has a genial wit, a keen relish for humor and, like a living sunbeam, he carries brightness with him wherever he goes. He is singularly pure in heart and thought, innocent as a lamb and always sportive and happy, and these qualities, added to his amiability and to the cheerfulness and generosity of his disposition, make him so lovable and so dear to his friends and schoolmates that he may be fittingly called "Tommy the beloved." It is true that, even now when his intellect

is so developed as to soar above the void of sight and hearing, the physical darkness and stillness of the room where he sits or studies are so deep that —

> No golden sunbeam strikes athwart the gloom,
> No mother's smile, no glance of loving eyes,
> Lightens the shadows of that lonely room.
> No children's laughter comes, no song of bird.
> The great world storms along its noisy way,
> But in this place no sound is ever heard.

Yet, to use the exquisite words of the gifted author of the above lines, Mrs. Laura E. Richards, "the clear whiteness of his radiant soul, like angel vestments shed, decks the dim walls, the lovely light of his innocence shines like a halo round his head, and his gentle thoughts make melody sweeter than aught flung from harp or viol."

The benefits which Tommy has derived from his residence and education at the kindergarten in a physical and mental, as well as in a moral and social point of view, can hardly be overrated. It is not claiming too much for the juvenile institution to say that nowhere else could his rescue and development have been so well effected, nor would it be possible to obtain the requisite financial assistance for work of this kind in any community outside of Boston. The little school was admirably fitted in every particular to give the remarkable results which have been therein achieved, and the service which it has rendered to the cause of humanity is of the highest order. To Tommy it has not been merely a healthful and congenial home or a place for ordinary educational advantages; it has been the means of his deliverance, the motive power of the development of what is best in him and the promoter of his intellectual and spiritual welfare. The unfortunate boy holds the same relation to it which a

branch bears to a tree, and the benignant influences which the kindergarten has exerted upon him are potent, permanent and fruitful. They are still living and working in him, sweetening his nature, exalting his spirit, building his character and pouring sunshine into his life.

At the beginning of the present school year Tommy was transferred from the kindergarten to the primary building. This change of residence makes no difference in the methods of his education. These are in every sense natural and thorough and in no wise artificial or showy. He is taught according to the fundamental principles that underlie Froebel's philosophy of education and is carefully protected from all dry and mechanical instruction, which fails to appeal to lively curiosity in the intellect or to impart any stimulating zest of pleasure to feeling or imagination. He is trained to use his hands intelligently, to learn by doing and not by any formal routine, and to be exact, faithful and upright in all things. Accompanied by his teacher he joins his classmates in their exercises in the schoolroom or in the gymnasium, and at the end of the hour runs out of doors to play and frolic with them.

Thanks to the exemplary generosity of Mrs. Quincy A. Shaw, who is one of the most generous promoters of sound educational enterprises for the benefit of the poor and the lowly, and whose deeds have shown her to be a worthy heir of the virtues of her distinguished father, the late Prof. Louis Agassiz, the sloyd training school at North Bennet street has been liberally supported and kept in the best working order. There Tommy, together with hundreds of other children, has had his hands properly trained and his brain steadily developed and cultivated under the wise super-

vision and skilful instruction of the principal of the institution, Mr. Gustaf Larsson, and his assistant, Mr. Sandberg.

Tommy still finds very great pleasure in all sorts of mechanical occupations. His interest in the use of tools is deeper than ever and he has made several articles which show conclusively that his talent in this direction has been gradually blossoming and coming to fruition. In regard to Tommy's progress in his sloyd work during the past year Mr. Larsson wrote, in response to an earnest request of mine, a brief account which I am permitted to publish herewith.

SLOYD TRAINING SCHOOL, November 6, 1899.

MY DEAR MR. ANAGNOS: — Tom's progress in sloyd during the past year has been most gratifying.

He has gained steadily in the control of his tools and in the quality of his work.

He has taken, as heretofore, two lessons a week, each lasting about two hours.

The most interesting feature of his work has been his spontaneous creations.

Twenty minutes of each lesson have been allowed him for making what he pleases, and it is a noteworthy fact that his most vigorous and independent work is done at this time. He will not allow the teacher to help him in the least when he is working on his own inventions.

This year he has made larger articles than heretofore, but his patience and interest have not flagged in spite of the longer road to attainment.

A sled three feet long, a bread-board made of five different pieces joined together and a table with square and dowelled joints are among the productions which attest his ability and skill.

Yours very truly, GUSTAF LARSSON.

Of the excellent work which Tommy has done during the past year in the line of local history and geography, as well as in sloyd, no better or more cogent

proof can be given than that afforded by the story of *Two Boston Boys*, which he himself composed and which he read last June from his manuscript in raised characters at our commencement exercises in the Boston Theatre before an immense and appreciative audience. Here is an exact copy of Tommy's paper.

Two Boston Boys: — The Puritan boy of 1690 — The Boston boy of 1899.— Boston is an old city. More than two hundred years ago the Puritans came across the ocean to find a new home in America. They built a town on three hills and named it Boston. That was their old home in England.

The little Puritan boy walked through grassy lanes instead of streets. He drove the cows to pasture on the Common. Washington St. is the old crooked cow-path. There was a high beacon on Beacon Hill and a windmill on Copp's Hill. The boys liked to coast down Beacon Hill in winter.

An Indian was the postman who carried letters from town to town. The people travelled by stage. The only ships were sailing vessels.

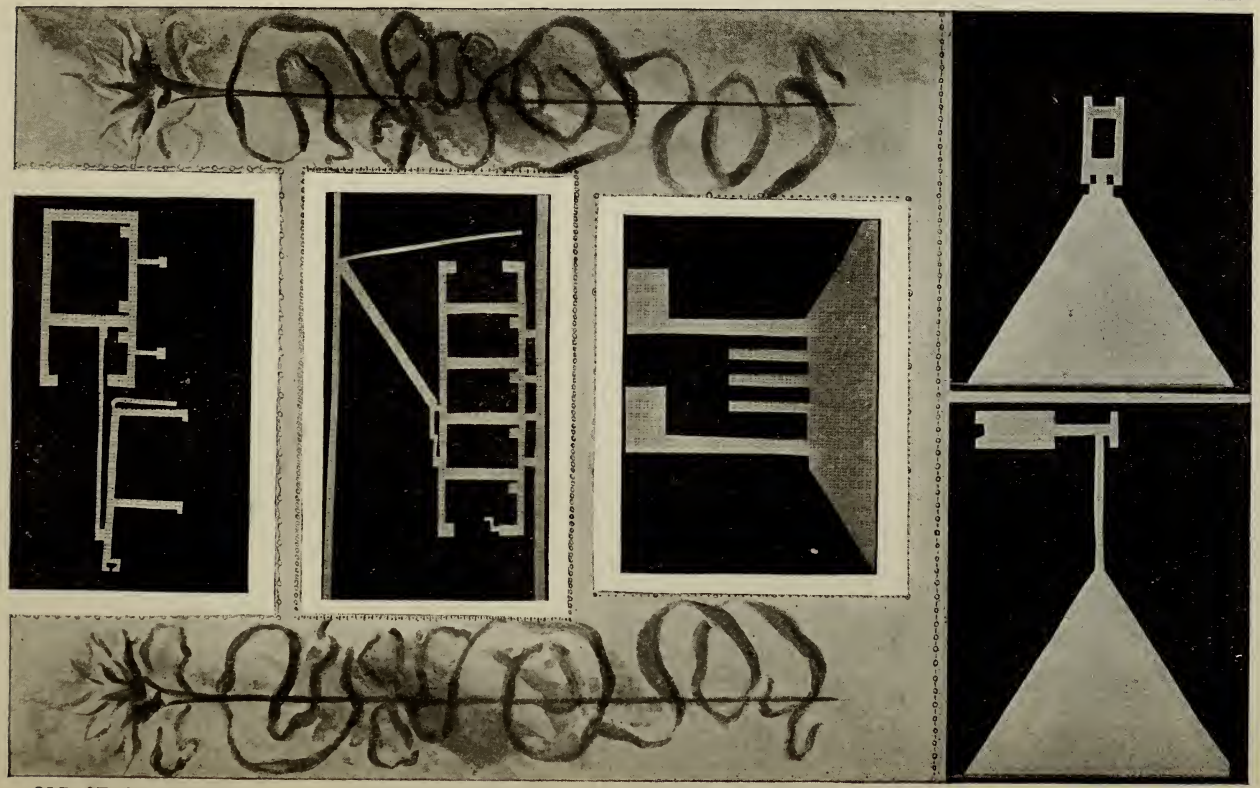
Because the people in Boston town were good and brave, it grew to be a big city. There are five hundred thousand people in Boston now.

The Boston boy of 1899 rides in steam and electric cars, and carriages without horses.

The mail and telephone and telegraph carry our messages. Steamboats cross the ocean in a week. There was not land enough for all the people so more land was made in the harbor. The old Town Dock is part of the Subway now. The little Puritan boy would find everything changed except the Common.

I am very glad that the little Puritan boy came across the sea from England to live in Boston in 1690, but I would rather be the Boston boy of 1899.

This story was composed by Tommy himself and written in the Braille point characters during his hours for play. It was profusely and cleverly illustrated by pictures of Tommy's own conceiving and outlining, cut out of white paper and pasted upon a



BEACON ON BEACON HILL.

OLD STAGE COACH.

ELECTRIC CAR.

SAILING VESSEL.

WINDMILL ON COPP'S HILL.

black background. In addition to this achievement, the table, which held his manuscript while he was reading, was made by his own clever hands.

The work accomplished by Tommy during the past year, the progress of his general development, the fine and amusing traits of his character, all these are exceedingly well brought out in the following instructive and entertaining account which has been prepared by his teacher, Miss Helen S. Conley. This narrative, like those that preceded it, has been written throughout with care, candor and accuracy, giving all the facts which it can be of any importance for the reader to know and containing nothing that is not perfectly correct and absolutely true. Here is Tommy's story as told by Miss Conley.

In swift and uneventful succession, the days and weeks of another year have passed, and the story of Tommy's life, as it has been spent among his familiar surroundings, is once again to be told.

It has been a quiet, unbroken year in the little family circle at the kindergarten, and not once has Tommy's place therein been vacant on account of illness. Days filled with pleasures which his friends in their loving-kindness are continually bringing to him, and which he enjoys with the zest of perfect health, are the only milestones to mark a busy year.

The weeks have wrought their changes in the little boy of a twelvemonth ago, who is now taller, sturdier, and far more independent, and who shows unmistakably in looks and disposition his Scotch ancestry. In spite of his rapid growth he still holds his firm, erect carriage, and on familiar ground walks with a sure, free independence. So true is his sense of locality that he will run fearlessly through the corridors and, when the doorway which he wishes to enter is reached, he will turn and, with unerring aim, enter it without slackening his pace in the least. The uncertain, lagging step which formerly made it a task, both difficult

and fatiguing, to walk with him, has disappeared, and he now keeps in even step with his companion, tireless for any distance. When, for any reason, he begins to droop, the air and sunshine are for him better restoratives than the prescriptions of any physician. These physical changes have not been the only ones however. It seems not unreasonable to trust that the forces which make for truth and uprightness and all that is best and highest in character-building have been as potent in their silent work as those which build up bone and muscle. Only those who see Tommy day by day can appreciate the struggle which he must make in order to do what he knows to be right, for the strong will which carries its point at any cost, is often the source of grave anxiety to those in authority over him, and the cause of many pricks of conscience to the little fellow himself.

Were it not for this tender conscience, which never fails to administer its silent rebuke, however great or small has been the misdemeanor, the effort to govern and control Tommy would be indeed a difficult one. After a brief respite from the usual routine of school-work, he found his allotted tasks especially irksome and, with this spirit predominant, the days were not happy ones. At length his better nature prevailed, and one morning he greeted us with this announcement: "Old Tom has gone — new Tom has come — new Tom is not cross and rude. Are you glad that old Tom has gone?" Henceforth, "new Tom" was the only one we knew.

A brief, backward glance over the year shows in a large measure a repetition of the general line of work of the preceding one. There has been a steady advance in every direction, and in all an effort to develop the thinking and reasoning powers and to increase the independent execution. Work in the classroom fills the greater part of the day and usually a long walk after school, with an hour's happy chat after supper, completes it.

For Tommy this closing hour is the happiest in the whole day, and he is never at a loss for topics for conversation, which, with a foresight that might well be imi-

tated by older persons than Tommy, he usually assigns himself, thus insuring his immunity from being at all bored. For instance, he will say complacently as he seats himself for the hour: "Now talk about electricity," and he will untiringly propound question after question concerning "the power — the wires — the motor" until his companion feels that nerves and energy are threadbare, even if the subject may not be.

Sometimes the hour is devoted to games, of which bagatelle is a favorite. With his type-slate Tommy keeps the "tally," with a separate column for each player, and at the end of the game he announces the results. Since this is quite a reminder of work in arithmetic, Tommy prefers to limit the number of players to a small and select few.

At the end of this playtime Tommy is never quite ready to retire. One night, when he had begged to defer the evil hour and "wait till eight," it was suggested to him that the night would thus be too short. "But I will stay in bed till eight in the morning," was the quick reply. This arrangement would be in exact accordance with Tommy's wishes, for the active brain rarely ceases to work, allowing sleep to rest both mind and body, until the evening is far spent. Returning consciousness in the morning finds him often tired and irritable, poorly prepared to meet the strain of the day. To counteract this mental activity a constant effort is made to tire him physically, but this is indeed a difficult task. His great muscular powers are rarely overtaxed, and the great problem with his present environment is to give him the physical exercise which his healthy body really needs. All athletic tendencies are gladly encouraged. Through the kindness of one of his good friends Tommy has been given his first instruction in swimming at the Brookline Natatorium. He himself is eager to own and ride a bicycle, and never allows the opportunity for a chance bit of practice to escape him.

When outdoor pleasures are not to be had, Tommy is never at a loss to find amusement in the house, and his

play is never aimless. He has always an end in view, usually the fashioning of some mechanical contrivance. Very clever have his little fingers become in fathoming the mystery of the working of many an appliance of common use, which many an older and wiser person than Tommy would be powerless to repair, should such a need arise. On one occasion he was very anxious to procure a bell, and the janitor, thinking that one which had lost its power to ring would be fully as useful for Tommy's purpose as a perfect one and that he would be happily unconscious of its lack, gave him an old bicycle gong. But Tommy quickly discovered the defect, remedied it, and in triumph exhibited the bell, explaining that it was "all mended now."

Several stormy afternoons were spent in cutting "checks" from brown paper, in exact imitation of the transfer checks given on a street-car. These were to be used in the barn during the summer, each check entitling the holder to a five-minute swing. In return for some little unusual attention and assistance upon the part of the conductor, when leaving a car one day, Tommy bestowed upon him one of these checks as a high mark of gratitude and appreciation. At another time he made a flag for his new flag-pole, measuring the dimensions which he deemed best suited to the height of the pole with the greatest care and doing the necessary sewing himself. Even the smallest detail of any work must be absolutely correct before Tommy is satisfied, and he will labor with infinite patience to make it so,— a trait of character which seems in strange contradiction to his quick, impulsive nature.

The activity of the fingers is second only to the activity of the brain, and the methodical bent of the mind betrays itself in many ways. He seems to have a genius for detail, and notices at once characteristics and qualities of objects which the ordinary observer would be long in noting with the eye. Let him go into a strange house, and upon his return he can tell the number of stairs, and of windows, the arrangement of the plumbing and other details, unnoticed by most people because so commonplace. Even those who are

constantly with him are often surprised to find how much information he has gained through this one means of touch.

The constantly increasing use which Tommy makes of signs proves that he is beginning to realize his limitations and to feel hampered by his meagre command of language. These signs are so simple and graceful, yet so expressive, that one wholly unacquainted with the manual alphabet could hardly fail to grasp his thought. Although Tommy's articulation is still the source of infinite trouble and anxiety, he has certainly made perceptible improvement in lip-reading, and he can now understand simple conversation by this method alone. While it is impossible, as yet, to communicate with him as rapidly in this manner as by the manual alphabet, it can be, and is, used when time is not a factor of importance.

He is still the same trusty little fellow whose "word is as good as his bond." During certain hours in the week he was often necessarily left to his own devices, and frequently some occupation in the line of definite work or reading was provided for this time. No matter how fascinating his play or how loath he was to leave it, he never failed to turn to the allotted task when the hour came, even though no teacher was at hand to enforce the law. One afternoon, a great temptation came to him in the form of a visit from a little friend whose call had long been anticipated with pleasure. Some occupation claimed the attention of all the older members of the family, and no one realized that Tommy's duties as host and pupil conflicted. The idea of being released from his promise never occurred to him; so, being too honorable to stoop to deception, he left his little guest to entertain himself, while Tommy, like a stoic, accepted the inevitable and seated himself for the reading which had been assigned for this half-hour.

Tommy's use of English is very original, and his sentences are models of brevity. Articles and prepositions he considers useless encumbrances; pronouns are thorns in the flesh; and all words not absolutely needful for the expression of the idea are discarded with scant ceremony by the

young man. The noun and verb unadorned furnish his conception of a complete sentence. Some of his expressions are peculiarly his own. Subtraction, he declared to mean, "all emptied." In speaking of a tall, slight friend, he remarked that "Mr. —— is long but not wide." "The birds have stopped," was his excited comment on finding two little sparrows with life extinct. "Poor I" is his pitying commiseration for some real or fancied personal ill.

The story of a writing lesson is illustrative of Tommy's interest in one subject and of his dogged determination to make all things bend in the direction of this important theme. He had announced his intention to write indefinitely on locks, weights and elevators, but had been invited, instead, to turn his attention to the prescribed lesson for the day on synonyms and sentence-building. Not to be diverted altogether from his original purpose, however, Tommy saw his opportunity with the first word, "allow," and wrote: "Allow means to say yes. Mr. Brown allows Tom to go to the barn and put up the elevator with a heavy weight, weighs about thirty-five pounds." Doubtless he would have continued with this subject, elaborating it to the end of the hour, had he not been advised to place a period here and advance to the next word, which was "rejoice." "Rejoice means to be glad. I rejoice to go to Wrentham to see Mr. and Mrs. Brown." His next sentence was a gentle reminder of the approach of winter. "Need means I must have. I need a new coat and cap." Then came a hint of his value in the domestic circle. "Daily means every day. Tom brings the potatoes up daily."

When Tommy was asked at Thanksgiving time why he was thankful, he replied, "for a big dinner." It seemed highly fitting that the true significance of the day should be again impressed upon him, and, as a result of the talk on this subject, Tommy wrote the following: —

WHY WE HAVE A THANKSGIVING DAY.

We have Thanksgiving because we want to say thank you and remember how many things we have to make us glad and happy

and thankful. I am thankful for friends and a happy home and warm clothes and good food and because I am not very sick.

Another original composition was Tommy's story of his own life. Many have been the questions which he has asked concerning the years which he cannot remember, and this was his story as he, one day, wrote it: —

TOM.

When Tom was a little boy he lived in Pennsylvania. When my mamma is going to the far country to rest, Tom is going to the Hospital. The bed and the doctor will make him better. The lady will take Tom to school, to see Miss Bull and Miss Brown and Fly all the three teachers who teach all day to make him grow up to be a good big boy. I could not talk and walk I was too small — you must wait for five years old. I went to the kindergarten to learn in school with Miss Brown and Miss Conley and all the teachers. I am glad that I came from Pennsylvania.

Well is it for Tommy that he cannot know the pathos which others read between these lines.

Very happily for himself as well as for others, Tommy is blessed with a keen sense of humor. He recently achieved his first pun and it was not a bad one, considering that he can have no knowledge of sound. It was in the sloyd class one day when an unknown plane was handed to him. "It is not a jack plane," was his soliloquy,— "not a block plane," — then, with a gleam of fun,— "it must be a Jamaica Plain."

He is a genuine boy and thoroughly enjoys a joke,— particularly when it is played by him upon some one else. One evening when he was about to retire, some time later than the other boys, it was noticed that he took with him a large rubber ball. His little room-mate always waits for a good-night salutation and in expectation of the accustomed ceremony was sitting up in bed. Tommy as usual approached, saying, "good-night, Eddie." Bending over, presumably to kiss him, Tommy gained a close proximity to Eddie's face, gave a sudden pressure to the ball and sent an unexpected shower-bath on Eddie's head.

The spluttering on his part and the giggling on Tommy's betrayed the fact that mischief was afoot and an investigation followed.

His vivid imagination not only supplements all descriptive efforts on the teacher's part, but is also the source of much comfort to Tommy. He can seemingly persuade himself that the imaginary is as satisfactory as the real when the latter is unattainable, and long conversations are held on this "make-believe" basis. One day, at the close of school, he appeared dressed for walking and remarked that he was "going to a far field to rest." His attitude all day had conveyed the distinct impression that he considered himself an overworked and much-abused individual; and he waited for an expression of regret at his intended departure. As none was forthcoming, he went on to divulge further his plans, saying that he should remain away over-night sleeping upon the grass,— and he even carried his play so far as to accept some crackers which were offered him for his supper. "Do not be late for school in the morning," was the parting injunction. That his plan had been received with so little surprise and that it had failed to produce the desired effect had been a slight disappointment to Tommy, and here was an opportunity to retire gracefully. "Who will tell me when to get up in the morning?" — in sudden remembrance of this necessary summons. A cow, discovering an intruder in her domain, was suggested as a possible substitute for a rising-bell. Tommy does not care for a close acquaintance with such messengers, and with a brief, but decisive,— "I will come back tonight," he ran off to play. At reading-time he reappeared, improved in health and spirits by his pretended sojourn in "the far field."

Tommy's excellent memory which so well retains facts, his general knowledge culled largely through his observant habit of mind and his association of ideas lead him to draw his own independent conclusions and have been most helpful factors in developing his thinking and reasoning powers. Sometimes his memory is almost too good, and Tommy will use your own line of argument to justify himself. Just before his departure for Wrentham, where he was to spend

the summer, a few suggestions were offered him regarding his ability to be of use in the family. The following week he was asked to spend some portion of each day during vacation in reading and study. This was an unwelcome request and with deep dejection on his face he retired to a corner to consider the matter. A happy thought occurred to him. "But I cannot study this summer," he eagerly explained. "Fly said I must take care of Mr. Brown." It was hard to convince him that assiduous care which would leave no time for study was not expected. At another time a reproof was administered, closing with the remark: "I am afraid Tom is very lazy." When he was next called to account for some unfinished work, it was his turn to explain: "Tom is very lazy," — with an air which said plainly,— "your own estimate of my character."

In all Tommy's work one of the underlying principles of education has been demonstrated again and again, namely that in order that the best results may be attained, there must first be aroused an active, intelligent interest in the study undertaken. The interest which Tommy takes in the sloyd work which is done under the direction of his teachers, while it is sincere, cannot be compared with that which he feels in his own inventions. In these he becomes for the time being completely absorbed. During the half-hour after the close of each sloyd lesson he has devoted himself to some original work. His first effort took the form of a house, strange in shape and appearance, but dear to him, and to his mind furnished with all the modern conveniences, — a chimney, window, door, door-bell, doorsteps and lock. It was interesting to note that the idea of appearance which naturally would not appeal to him, was always subordinate to that of utility, and that what interests him most in an actual house was first reproduced in his miniature one. When completed, Mr. Larsson's name was written upon the door, and it was given to him. This was followed by the construction of a flag-pole, several feet high, on a stand, skilfully arranged so that the flag could be hoisted or lowered at will. His last invention was a long car-track. His regular work in sloyd has included a bread-board, made

from five alternate strips of gum and white wood, glued together, two picture-frames and a table. This last piece of work was, by far, the longest and most difficult, but great was his pride when he could exhibit it in its finished state.

Fortunate indeed has Tommy been, that he could continue for another year under the skilful instruction of two such teachers as Mr. Larsson and Mr. Sandberg, for they not only have given him the finest possible training in sloyd, but have established for him, in ability and character, a standard to which it is now his ambition to attain. All Tommy's after-life will be fuller and richer in interests and knowledge because such as they have counted not their time or effort dear unto themselves but have willingly and gladly given him of their best.

During the year Tommy has spent many happy hours exploring the historic spots of Boston and its suburbs, gaining thus an intimate personal knowledge of sites made famous by the deeds of long ago. Thus history and geography have gone hand in hand.

His knowledge of the location of Boston streets would do credit to an old resident,—a fact which was demonstrated one evening when the family was invited to play "electric car." Since his ambition is divided between the attainment of the position of motor-man and that of elevator-boy, he reserved the post of conductor for himself and the other members of the family served as passengers. Standing without in the corridor, he would open the door with a flourish and announce the name of the street which the car had reached, surprising all by the number of streets with which he was familiar, and the order in which he named them. When his passengers were slow in leaving the car, and a street was called, known to be frequented by one of them, he would jog the memory of the delinquent with the suggestion: "Miss —, get out here!"—a service seldom rendered by the ordinary conductor.

During the past year Tommy has grown to be quite a financier. Formerly time and money were equally valueless to him; now he hoards both like a miser. A friend, in sending a gift of money for his use, enclosed a dollar

with the request that Tommy be allowed to carry it in his purse and enjoy the pleasure of absolute ownership, spending it for whatever he might wish. Probably never again will Tommy feel so rich as he did when he became the proud possessor of that dollar, and he was never separated thereafter from his purse, insisting always upon paying his small bills from his own money. But he must be very firmly convinced, in his own mind, of the need or utility of any article before he will part with any of his wealth. Almost his first question regarding any object is now, "how much did it cost?" and he is very likely to bestow this admonition: "Be very careful,—it costs too much money."

Yet, while Tommy hesitates to spend his money for himself, he is a willing and generous giver. It is his joy to save his pennies for the Christmas season, and the birthday anniversaries are his especial care. Announcing, one day, that Mr. Brown's birthday was at hand, he asked to be allowed to purchase a necktie as a gift for that good friend. Tommy's companion urged her utter ignorance as to the style which would be suitable and acceptable, as a reason for some other choice, but Tommy was not to be moved. "I will show you," he remarked blandly, and he himself selected one of the style invariably worn by his friend, paid for it with great satisfaction and carried it home, to be laid carefully away until the eventful day arrived. At another time he with several of the other boys had spent a happy day away from home and all had been recipients of various small gifts of money. It was suggested that each should contribute a small sum to provide a little treat for the boys at school who had missed the good time. When the plan was made known to Tommy, he cheerfully asked: "How much shall I give?"—"Just what you wish," was the reply. A careful examination of his purse revealed a small collection of coins of various denominations and among them a silver quarter. He at once rejected all the others and gave this freely and cheerfully for the boys.

With the feeling of pity, which Tommy's affliction always awakens in those who come in contact with him, there is

invariably combined the desire to give expression to it by lavishing gifts upon him; and hence there is every tendency to spoil the child and make his life a thoughtless, selfish, self-centred one, unless, in these early, formative years, there can be engrafted into his character a counter-influence of unselfish interest in the well-being of those around him. For this reason every indication of generous thought and purpose is eagerly noted and counted as a signal victory.

The account of this year of Tommy's life cannot be closed without a tribute to all — and their name is legion — who have helped to bring so much happiness and brightness to this little soul. Every one whom he meets shows him unfailing love and kindness, from the roughest laborer in the street to the polished, refined gentleman who opens to him the doors of his own home, to make him gladly welcome. One dear little fellow, himself blessed with abounding health, throughout one day had watched Tommy's every movement with overflowing sympathy. At length, when his emotion had to find some vent, he invested his entire week's allowance in some tin soldiers, and gave his little all to Tommy. In the same spirit a rough old sailor parted with his choicest and, as might well be imagined, his only coin,— a treasure which, he solemnly assured Tommy, was saved "from the Christobal Colon." Doubtless he thought, in his rough kindliness, that this fact would enhance its value in the mind of a boy, little realizing that as yet Tommy's faith in the brotherhood of man is unshaken, and that "wars and rumors of wars" are beyond his comprehension.

Last, but by no means least, is the loving thoughtfulness of Tommy's good friend, Mr. Joseph B. Glover. Increasing years have not made him unmindful of "one of these little ones," nor have growing infirmities caused him to forget that humanity with its needs is still urging its claims today, as surely as in the years that are gone. With a judicious and far-reaching thought for the future, he sent one day to Tommy a gold piece to be used as the nucleus of a bank account which, once started, may be added to as opportunity offers and, in the proverbial "rainy day" of the uncertain

future, prove not only a timely aid but a lasting memorial of him who gave it.

Many times is the question asked,— does the result obtained with such a child repay the time and effort given,— the expenditure, financial and physical, which such training involves? Would it not be far better were such energy diverted to other channels? To all persons making such inquiries, those who see and know Tommy in his daily life would say, while the ideal which is desired and the actual which is reached lie immeasurably far apart, yet the only bridge which will ever span the gulf between them is earnest unremitting effort.

In lessons of love, patience and kindness, Tommy has been an unconscious teacher. He has brought to many a mute reproach for their ingratitude and a better appreciation of the common blessings of life as well as an inspiration to use aright the powers which they possess, by the contrast of his life with their own. Who can ask for a greater sphere of usefulness in the world than this? If his life has done so much thus far, surely it is not in vain that it be prepared for higher service. We must consider, too, what increase of knowledge must mean to Tommy, as well as the influence which his life has had on those around him. If he can be lifted from the plane of utter nothingness in which he was found and made to be a man, intelligent, self-respecting, self-supporting, fitted to take a man's place in the world and to bear a man's share of its responsibilities, who shall dare to question whether it has paid? Freely have we received of these good gifts, denied to him, freely let us give of them to him, that at last it may be truly said that this little one who so long has "sat in darkness" has "seen a great light."

Wrentham has lost none of its attractions for Tommy. On the contrary, it continues to share with the kindergarten his warm affection and strong attachment, and to be his abode during the summer vacation. It forms a part of his life, and his fondness for it and the appreciation of the blessings which he

enjoys there increase with his advancing years. The beloved people, who have opened to him not only their house but their hearts, have treated him as if he were their own child and have made him feel that there is a spot on earth which he may call his home. He seems to think, that he is a junior partner of his dear friend, the Rev. William L. Brown, in the ownership of the farm, and takes the most profound interest in it and in everything pertaining to it. He exercises a general supervision over the buildings and looks after the repairs. Doors, windows, locks, the cords of the sash, water-pipes, the fastenings of the rooms, the utensils of the kitchen, the piles of wood, all these are kept in mind and receive his unfailing attention, nor does he forget to watch over the condition of the garden, the orchard, the barn, the fields and the boats on the pond. Indeed, he is inclined to play the rôle of a little proprietor and to feel the burden of his responsibilities. He is eager to lighten the labors of the venerable head of the family and also to help Mrs. and Miss Brown in the performance of their domestic duties. The latter is his wise mentor and constant companion. In the course of the summer she visited with him several places of interest, and about a week before the opening of the school term he sent to me from Wrentham a brief account of his excursions and doings. Here is his letter.

Dear Mr. Anagnos, I went to Chicopee Falls, Springfield, and to Holyoke, three cities near the Connecticut river in Massachusetts. I went up to the top of Mount Tom. It is twelve hundred and sixty six feet high. Boys can not coast with sleds because it is so steep and rough.

I have been to Providence and to Block Island. The boat rolled. It was fun.

I ride on the merry go round I made in the barn. It goes very

fast I put a bar to keep the boys from sliping The elevator is down. I am too big, I am thirteen years old. I put two sills on the windows, to keep the cold out in winter. There is a big pile of wood in the shed. I got up at five o'clock to throw in the wood. And I fill the wood box, for Mrs. Brown. It is a good long time for vacation. We are going to school Tuesday at noon. I will not cry. I am going to stay out of doors in winter and play with my sled.

Good bye with love from TOM.

Miss Laura A. Brown, Tommy's former teacher and devoted friend, has charge of him during his stay at Wrentham and does everything in her power to make him comfortable and contented, to improve his mind and to strengthen his character. She keeps a record of such facts and incidents as relate to his daily life and occupations, and from her notes the following account has been compiled.

Tommy in Wrentham. Very little that is new can be recorded of this vacation season. Each day brought its activities, suggested by the healthy growing mind of a thirteen-year-old boy. A short time, both morning and afternoon, was set apart for reading, writing or work on the type slate,— a duty which sometimes conflicted with his pleasure and caused Tommy to protest that he was "too busy" to read. The urgent business might be the adjusting of some new device called a bell, a tramp through the orchard or a visit to "his" sweet apple tree to munch its fruit.

There were at least four bells in the barn and shed, one of which was for the iceman's special use. Before the time for the latter's regular visit, Tommy would bolt the shed door,— sometimes to the inconvenience of the family,— but he was always at hand to swing the door wide open at the thud of the bell. One in the barn, used in connection with his elevator and swing, was of great service when Tommy was playing up on the beams, for a vigorous pull of the string would bring him quickly within reach.

Some of Tommy's time-honored amusements have lost their charm, and he deems himself "too old" for playing rain or for the elevator which, although during the early part of the summer it made many trips a day, with Tommy at one end of the rope nicely balanced by a pail of stones at the other, was later superseded by a new arrangement of ropes, chains and whiffle-tree, with a swing-board for a seat, called a "merry-go-round." Sitting in this, with a strap around his neck as security against falling and with his feet as motive power, Tommy went around and around in a circle as wide as the barn floor would permit.

There were frequent walks in the orchard taken with an iron roller, pushed before him by means of a handle which he had fastened to it. It looked like hard work even for a seeing boy who could avoid the worst inequalities, but Tommy heeded them not, seeming rather to rejoice at the hills and rough places.

Like any other boy, Tommy enjoyed paddling around the pond in the boat, hunting for clams and making the circuit of the pond by pulling at the tufts of grass on the banks. He has learned to row, an accomplishment of which he is duly proud, because it shows how strong his arms are.

The year's supply of firewood was housed by this same sturdy boy, who would work an hour or two at a time, throwing it into the shed as it was split. So enthusiastic did he become that he rose at five o'clock on several mornings during the summer, so that he might accomplish this duty before it came hot. When, by mistake, he woke and dressed at four o'clock and aroused the whole family by the bang of the wood as it flew into the shed, they wished that he were less energetic. He has also kept the wood-box well filled, and he would willingly leave his play to perform this duty or to assist in beating eggs, husking corn or shelling peas or beans.

Many hours were happily spent in the shop where Tommy's skilful handiwork was attested by a very neatly made shelf for his own choice possessions and by strips of board, fitted and nailed to the window-sills. He proudly explained that these were to keep out the cold in winter and

that the open spaces at either end of one of the strips were "for the spiders to go in and out." All things in the shop he has been allowed to use freely unless he destroyed or injured something. After having been reproved for several such misdeeds, he came in with a valueless little piece of iron, which he held up and turned around so that it might be perfectly seen, saying: "May I have it? may I have it? I do not like Mr. Brown to say I am a naughty boy, no."

A short journey to Springfield and Chicopee Falls gave great pleasure to Tommy, and many were his questions as to location, size and distance from Boston, of the cities and places passed or visited. He remarked that Springfield was a pretty city but not like Boston because it had "no ocean, no common and no Beacon hill." Later he expressed his pity for Springfield because it had no subway and because the electric cars were not like those of Boston. The ride up Mount Tom was the crowning-point of his happiness,—"like an elevator up, up, up," was his comment. When he reached the top he stretched up his hands, expecting to touch the sky, and, failing in this, he said: "It is a big air and a big country." A sail to Block Island was another treat to Tommy, for he enjoys being on a boat, of which the hurricane deck is the pleasantest part, to his mind. From this point he begged for frequent journeys to the lower deck "for a drink of water," in order that he might have the fun of going up and down the stairs and might feel the motion of the boat more fully.

But not every day was cloudless. Three were spent in bed, and on two occasions Tommy's poor nose was stung by hornets, so that his face became badly swollen. He bore the pain and discomfort bravely, laughing at his fat face, but he studiously avoided the places where the encounters had taken place, and rejoiced when the nests were destroyed and the hornets killed. Until then he would often ask if the hornets had been told that they must not sting. One of these injuries was received on Tommy's birthday, whereat he said pityingly: "Poor thirteen."

Tommy reasons in a logical way and sticks persistently

to a subject until he gets a satisfactory idea of it. He asks many questions which would do credit to a boy of his age with all his faculties while, on the other hand, his shut-in condition makes it hard for him to understand many common things. He has, of course, no conception of light. Standing over a bowl of hot water, he said: "Feel the sun, yes, it is like the sun." At one time, when he was urging his companions to go out-doors to see something at night, he was told "it is so dark I cannot see." "I am not dark," Tommy answered quickly.

Very reluctantly Tommy turned his back on Wrentham when the time came to do so, but he said several times: "It is a good long vacation. I will not cry." All his treasured playthings — ropes, nails, locks, bottles and sticks — were packed away and the roller was cleaned and oiled, so that it would not squeak nor rust, by a very sober and even tearful boy; but, when the last moment came, he set bravely forth, with a sunny face, for Boston and school.

This account of what Tommy has accomplished during the past twelve months, and of his general development, added to those which have been published in former years, proves the correctness of the statement made at the beginning of this section, namely that his case is truly a remarkable one. It presents a rich field for pedagogical, scientific and humanitarian explorations. In looking at the two pictures, which are inserted in the next page, one cannot help realizing how marvellous is the transformation from darkness to brightness when he sees the light of intelligence and animation and the joy of life beaming forth on Tommy's countenance, which once was so vacant, so dismal and so forlorn!

It may be said without exaggeration, that so far as achievement of results is concerned Tommy's record surpasses that of all other persons in his condition. It bears witness to the marked enlargement of the ca-

pacities of his mind, the steady development of the sweetness of his nature and the constant increase of the admirable qualities of his character. Moreover, it speaks very eloquently of the unstinted liberality of those who have kindly volunteered to supply the means for his maintenance and education. Nothing could have been done without their assistance.

DARKNESS.

Tommy Stringer soon after he arrived, scarcely able to walk and totally helpless, although nearly five years old.

LIGHT.

The Tommy Stringer of three years later.

The most prominent of Tommy's benefactors, to whose generosity his emancipation and training are mainly due, are Mr. Joseph B. Glover, a dear anonymous friend who has paid from time to time such deficits as occurred in Tommy's accounts, Mrs. Warren B. Potter, Mrs. George W. Wales, Mrs. Annie B. Matthews, Miss Sarah M. Fay, Mr. James Eckersley

of Plattsburgh, N.Y., Mrs. J. Conklin Brown of Greensborough, Ga., and her little son Warner, the Misses Jane F. and Lucia Dow of Milton, Miss Flora E. Rogers of New York, Mrs. C. C. Chadwick, Miss Mary D. Sohier, Mrs. Dudley L. Pickman, Mrs. B. L. Young, Mrs. John Jay Chapman of New York, Miss Susan Day Kimball, Miss Eleanor G. May, trustee of the Lydia Maria Child fund, Mrs. William H. Slocum, Mrs. E. Rollins Morse, children of the kindergarten at Florence, Mass., Mr. Robert D. McGonnigle of Pittsburg, Pa., the late Miss Emily M. Everett of Cleveland, Ohio, and many others, whose names are printed in full in the report of the kindergarten for the blind. All these generous and kind-hearted givers have ample reason to rejoice over the splendid results which have been obtained by the help of their gifts. Through their liberality Tommy has been restored to human fellowship, is comforted in the bosom of society and is enjoying the advantages of education and the blessings of domestic life.

I cannot refrain from speaking at this juncture of the groundlessness of the impression which prevails among many people, that sufficient provision has already been made for Tommy, that he is favored with a large number of sympathizers who are actively interested in him, and that all his wants, present and future, are amply supplied. I wish from the bottom of my heart, that these notions were correct; but I am grieved to be obliged to state that they are entirely erroneous.

The truth of the matter is that, with the exception of the amount of forty dollars per annum which has been provided for him through the keen foresight and thoughtful generosity of his beloved friend, Mr. Joseph B. Glover, Tommy has nothing coming to him regu-

larly from any direction. Indeed, it is with immense difficulty and by means of constant personal appeals that the requisite sum of money for his support is obtained.

But for obvious reasons this state of things is exceedingly precarious, and we feel, that a surer and more permanent source of revenue ought to be procured for the unfortunate boy without further delay. Action should be taken while the intelligent and well-to-do members of our community are still manifesting both a profound interest in Tommy and his work and a disposition to lend a helping hand to him and encourage him to go forward. It is high time for us to seize the opportunity and inaugurate an immediate movement for securing a fund for his benefit large enough to yield a yearly income of five hundred dollars, such fund to be raised with the distinct understanding, that it is to be placed under the care and control of the trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, and that only its net income is to be given to Tommy so long as he lives or is in need of it, the principal remaining intact forever. It should be further understood, that at his death, or when he is otherwise provided for, another child similarly afflicted shall have the benefit of this fund.

With this explanation we appeal most earnestly to the public in general and to Tommy's loyal friends and benefactors in particular, asking them for gifts toward this permanent fund, as well as for a sufficient number of annual subscriptions to pay his current expenses, and we fervently hope that this request will meet with a favorable response.

From the depths of the dense darkness and awful stillness in which he is plunged, the unfortunate boy is as incapable of pleading his own case in eloquent words as he is of singing a song of glee or a carol of joy. His voice can be of no service to him in portraying his condition or in presenting his claim to a thorough education, which is to him the veritable bread of life and therefore of infinitely greater importance than to children possessed of all their faculties. In all probability he does not realize fully the extent of his indebtedness to his benefactors, and therefore he does not take up his pencil to write a few words to them, acknowledging their goodness towards him and expressing his sentiments of high appreciation and of profound gratitude to them for what they have done for him. Nevertheless, he is gradually becoming conscious of the inestimable value of the aid which they bestow upon him, and, although mutely and unostentatiously yet touchingly and earnestly,—

> He sends a prayer from his heart's deep core,
> And flings a plea upwards to heaven's door,

for their spiritual well-being, as well as for their happiness and continued prosperity.

In the whole range of humble and pathetic supplications is there one which can reach the throne of glory more quickly or will be heard more attentively than that which emanates from the white soul and the sealed lips of Tommy Stringer?

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Anagnos, Michael
Thomas Stringer, HIS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING DURING THE YEAR 1898-1899.

Date Due

~~4-18-71~~			
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